

King County Agriculture Commission
Minutes from August 12, 2004
KC Fairgrounds Fieldhouse Conference Center
Enumclaw, WA

Commissioners Present: George Irwin, Roger Calhoon, Dick Gradwohl, Nancy Hutto, Gaylia Bullock, Grant Davidson, Ben Kodama, Bob Tidball, Judy Duff and Ewing Stringfellow

Commissioners Absent: Jason Roetcisoender and Michael Blakely

Staff: Judy Herring, Eric Nelson, Claire Dyckman, Steve Evans, Laurie Clinton, King County (KC) Dept. of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) Agriculture Programs; and Sylvia Kantor, Washington State University (WSU) Extension KC

Guest Agency Staff: Bob Burns, Deputy Director, KCDNRP; Faith Roland, KCDNRP Acquisitions Program; Dave Marks, Manager KC Fairgrounds; Leslie Zenz, Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA); and Mike Mactutis, Staff, City of Kent

Guests: Tom Quigley

Vice-Chair George Irwin called the meeting to order at 4:12pm. He noted the changes to the agenda.

Roll call – Those present identified themselves as shown above, Michael Blakely had notified staff to be excused.

(note: Judy Duff, Ewing Stringfellow and Roger Calhoon arrived after roll call)

George thanked everyone for coming and requested introductions beginning with the audience and then had Commissioners do their Roundabout as they introduced themselves.

Commission Roundabout

Gaylia Bullock attended the Puget Sound Wool Pool Day and she was disappointed to learn that so few sheep producers participate. This event was created to allow sheep producers to “pool” their wool for commercial sale. There are four producers who participated and they shipped 1575 pounds of wool.

Her farm participated in the NorthWest Ram test – which is available to anyone who raises sheep to test their rams for a 60-day period.

Grant Davidson participated in the press event at Pike Place Market to announce the Farm Aid Concert in September, which will be held for the first time in a West Coast City. It has never been held outside of the Midwest. He also attended the Puget Sound Fresh press event where plaques were awarded to grocery stores that participate in purchasing locally grown produce.

George Irwin said that while there was a bunch of 4-H kids at the Fair, overall 4-H participation was light for cattle.

There were some hogs entered and there were 4-H kids from other counties, which was good. There was also light participation from FFA so they hope to encourage more participation next year. He said he had been contacted regarding the 4-H Horse Club issues at the Fair, and he would wait to comment after Dave gives more details.

Bob Tidball reported on two significant events he participated in this month. One was the planning session for the next Western WA Ag Summit, and the other is a study group selected by the Community Trade and Economic Development (CTED) staff from Olympia that is evaluating the effectiveness of agriculture programs in four counties.

Richard Gradwohl announced he has been working with the government of South Africa. His farm has imported a large quantity of semen straws for artificial insemination from his Kentshire miniature cattle (named after the city of Kent). South Africa will be hosting the International Miniature Cattle Symposium, and they have invited him to be the keynote speaker.

Nancy Hutto continues her support to the Hmong farmers at Pike Place by serving as their liaison and advocating for them with market staff.

Approval of Minutes

Motion 01-0804 Bob made the motion to accept the revised June minutes and Dick seconded. Passed unanimously.

Commission Business

Chair report: George said he hadn't prepared anything, but was happy to report he is feeling good 30 days post-stroke, doing some therapy and going back to work.

Commission staff report:

Laurie told about the passport program at the Fair and showed a couple of the posters that corresponded to the passports. She said it was a success based on the enthusiasm shown by those who participated and others who offered to help next year. Laurie also reminded and encouraged Commissioners to fill out their expense forms. She will assist by filling out the basic information.

Eric provided updates on the Agriculture Drainage Ditch Program (ADAP) construction projects.

He mentioned that the Commission would get their first presentation on one of the WRIA plans today. Eric met with Lauren Smith, council staff; for a briefing on 3-4 ag issues the Council is addressing in the Comprehensive Plan

amendments. These issues will come before the Regulatory and Land Use Committee (August 26th, 1-4pm) and they will bring recommendations to the full Ag Commission in September.

Eric noted that this coming Monday, Judy H. will meet with agency staff and the developer of the Snohomish County wetland mitigation banking project in the Snoqualmie Valley to continue discussion and contact with the developer and Snohomish County.

Eric expanded on the ag study group activities that Bob T. mentioned are underway through the Community Trade and Economic Development (CTED) Department in Olympia.

Next week KC Ag Program staff is meeting with ag staff from several other counties to share their work programs and discuss ag issues. Eric, Steve and Judy will be attending.

Eric reviewed the budget decision resulting in the loss of the Farm Specialist position and suggested possible actions for the Commission to take.

He reported on the status for the Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) and said it is still being discussed at the KC Growth Management Committee. It is expected to go before full council in October.

Eric also reminded committee members that the last Monday of month, August 30th, is the Ag Program committee meeting from 10:00am – 12:00 noon. Most of the meeting will be spent on setting criteria recommendations for surplus farmland sale.

KC Fair Report:

Dave Marks, Fair Manager, reported on the 2004 Fair held in July. He said it was a tough fair, with lots of expectations and not all of them were met and the extremely hot weather accounted for a tremendous drop in attendance. However, he did have good reports from vendors and there was an increase in activities this year, as people had requested. Dave provided information sheets on attendance and ticket sales and a copy of the Fair's rating letter from WA Department of Agriculture Fair Commissioner. He said that the WSDA Fair Judges thought the passport/poster project was good, but the Fair was given a low rating because the ag education component did not show the regional economic impact of agriculture in the County. Dave explained the circumstances regarding the 4-H Horse Club situation and said they are trying hard to get it resolved. There was discussion and Commissioners offered possible solutions. Commissioners also offered input on next year's Fair that included: increasing the Open Livestock classes; increasing 4-H participation; adding different types of vendors; and having additional types of activities. Dave also explained the current budget situation and plans for securing new revenue sources. In response to questions on the increased cost of vendor space and vacant spaces this year, Dave said he would report back on absent vendors and their reasons for not returning to the Fair this year.

Agency Reports

Washington State University (WSU) Extension: Sylvia Kantor announced the upcoming 14-week, Small Farms Program "Cultivating Success" class that begins on Sept. 8 in Renton. She passed around a WSU information packet that contained: Creating a Healthy Foodshed; Farming For the Future; Ditch Maintenance Research Project; Biological Control of Noxious Weeds; 4-H Agriculture Program; 2003 Harvest Tour Celebration; and 2004 Small Farm Expo. She also handed out the Farm Aid booklet – 10 Ways to Ensure Health Food.

Farmlands & Fields Proposal Discussion and Recommendation

Bob Burns returned to the Commission for the final discussion on the Farmlands & Fields Proposal - swapping King County park property 60-Acres South for the Lake Washington Youth Soccer Association (LWYSA) Farmlands Preservation Property (FPP) known as Parcel B. Faith Roland, KC Acquisition Supervisor, accompanied Bob to explain in more detail how appraisals are handled.

Bob reviewed the project and repeated that he truly does not see it as one use gaining at the expense of another. He said the intent of the Executive was to get farming on the property again and to provide another much needed athletic field.

Bob said that this is seen as a solution that resolves the ongoing conflict between two important land uses in the Sammamish Valley and he is confident it is not a detriment to the Farmlands Preservation Program.

Faith explained appraisals and assessments. She said that assessments are the estimated land value of a property to determine the property taxes due. This formula is done differently than an appraisal. Assessments are done en mass, all similar parcels in one area are treated the same for value estimations.

Assessments are done by the Tax Assessor's Office. Appraisals are done on an individual property at any given point in time. An appraisal can relate to the assessed value, but it doesn't have to and in fact it seldom does. Appraisals are done by specialists, not by the Assessor's Office.

Bob talked about appraisals in the north end and why they were much higher than 60-Acres South. He explained that zoning and transaction circumstances were different, so like comparisons are not possible. Faith explained that the real estate market also drives appraisals.

In response to the Commission's question on how Ag Program staff feels about this proposal, Eric said he felt that this proposal is good because it gets 60 acres of farmland back in production. He said he feels it does not harm the Farmland Preservation Program and that it puts an end to the countless hours of staff time working on this issue since 1996.

There were more comments and questions on: soils comparison of the two sites; the Bear Creek Proposal; zoning and potential for future zoning changes; water availability and water rights; the implications to the Farmlands Preservation Program; and ag land being purchased on speculation.

In answer to the question about having it rezoned and outright selling the 60-Acres South property, Bob replied that on designated park lands, the County cannot change the land use or zoning or sell it.

There was concern expressed about finding someone to farm Parcel B since the cost for the property could be extremely high. Eric said he is confident based on feedback he's received from the ag community that there are willing buyers or people willing to lease it who will farm it.

Public Comment

Tom Quigley said that he felt that all farmers essentially speculate when they purchase farmland. He urged the Commission to look at this as an opportunity for enhancing ag opportunities in the Sammamish Valley and that should be the focus of the decision.

He believes this project is a good move and will be a benefit to agriculture in the Sammamish Valley.

Farmlands & Fields Proposal cont'd

Motion 02-0804 George made the motion to endorse the Farmland & Fields Proposal, swapping 60-Acres South for LWYSA Parcel B and Nancy seconded.

Judy asked the Commissioners go around the table to state their perspective on the swap then called for a vote. Those in favor; Ewing, Nancy and George. Those against; Bob, Dick, Roger, Gaylia, Ben and Grant. Motion failed.

The Commission agreed to send a letter to the Executive stating their reasons for not giving a recommendation for the proposal. Laurie will have a draft letter for review and approval at the September meeting. Judy thanked Bob for his several visits to the meetings to go thoroughly over this issue and that it was very much appreciated. She also thanked Faith for coming.

Reasons for Creating a Food Policy Council

Leslie Zenz and Sylvia Kantor described a Food Policy Council and the important role it plays in food issues. Leslie led the presentation with the startling fact that Washington is 5th in the nation for population of hungry people. Food Policy Councils commonly include farmers, food processors, wholesalers and distributors, grocers, restaurateurs, anti-hunger advocate, school districts, and community and religious leaders. The basic purpose of a council is to develop and support projects and policies to improve communities' access to healthy food and nutrition education as well as providing support to local farmers and sustainable farming practices. By bringing together these diverse stakeholders a whole new level of food awareness and policy impacts on agriculture is created. Leslie is working with eleven other states on their Food Policy Councils. Leslie made it clear that a Food Policy Council would not take the place of an Ag Commission. The two have distinctly different missions, but they would coordinate and work together on issues to create a greater and stronger voice for agriculture. Currently there is funding in the Governor's office for the state group, but there is no local funding available for a county or regional group.

Sylvia is coordinating the organizing group, which has met several times. The group continues to grow as efforts are made to include all those involved in food. This is still in the preliminary planning stage and the current focus is determining the goals & purpose. Sylvia encouraged interested Commissioners to attend. The meetings are held the 3rd Thursday of the month - next meeting Aug. 19th, 1-4pm at Renton WSU. The September 16th meeting will be the Farm Aid meeting held at Pike Place Market. Judy thanked Leslie and Sylvia and encouraged Commissioners to participate.

City of Kent – Proposed Restoration Project

Mike Mactutis described the restoration project Kent is proposing for Mill Creek. He explained the benefits and cost of the project. The cost is two million dollars, which includes acquisitions and construction. His reason for coming before the Commission was to solicit a letter of support to accompany the city's application for a KC Conservation Futures grant. Mike responded to Commissioners questions on: the benefit to agriculture; riverbank levees, improvements to drainage in the valley, and response of impacted landowners. Mike said that the land is zoned "Ag support", which is for ag warehouses, retail or processing facilities. The work will be done in a flood way so it couldn't be developed anyway.

However, it does take about eight acres out of grass production. There has been no opposition from landowners who have been contacted.

Motion 03-0804 Bob moved to support Kent restoration program and Grant seconded. Motion passed with George abstaining and Ewing no. Judy thanked Mike for returning to the Ag Commission to give his presentation again.

Flood Hazard Reduction Plan

Claire provided a brief overview of the draft “Framework for Making Decisions Regarding Flood Management and Agricultural Lands”. This is the proposal from Agriculture Program staff for making decisions about public flood management funding uses to protect ag lands or adjacent facilities in the designated Agricultural Resource Lands that border the major rivers. The framework consists of five premises that define county mandates involving ag lands. Claire explained that the Regulatory and Land Use committee will work on this and report back to Commission. She described the issues being considered regarding decisions on protecting farmland from flooding, the process being used to update the plan, and the factors driving the decisions.

Claire invited any interested Commissioners to serve on the Flood Hazard Reduction Citizen’s Advisory Committee. She told them to please let Laurie know and she will provide the necessary information.

Watershed Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) Recovery Plans

Claire began by highlighting the accomplishment of Bill Knutsen and Eric Nelson’s hard work to get the ag section “8.1 Agriculture” included in the draft Snohomish River Basin Salmon Conservation Plan. This is a key policy supporting viable agriculture. Claire then summarized the WRIA process and explained that the basis for this work is salmon recovery efforts. The first plan for the Commission’s comments in relationship to agriculture will be the Cedar River Watershed. Then most likely it will be the Green, Sammamish or Snohomish. The Commission will be asked to provide comments on the agriculture components. The Regulatory and Land Use Committee will also have a recommendation regarding the Cedar Draft Plan at the September meeting. Judy thanked Claire for an extremely concise report.

Old Business

Discussion continued on the elimination of the Farm Specialist position from Ag Programs. The Commission asked that Laurie request on their behalf for Daryl Grigsby to come to the September meeting to further explain the reason for this decision and to discuss the impacts to agriculture in the County resulting from the loss.

Commissioners expressed their concerns on the loss of the Farm Specialist position and why it is so important to keep the position. They included: when work force reduction impact is not proportional – loss of one staff from a larger program not the same impact as one staff from Ag programs; loss of marketing and promotion; end to regional agriculture promotion and support efforts; loss of position as much a threat to ag, as loss of farmland; will ag programs be ended as well?; are there any other possible funding sources for position; role in Western WA Agriculture Commission Summits; key King County contact for farmers; and keeping farming economically feasible is important for salmon habitat

Motion 04-0804 Ewing made the motion, with a friendly amendment from Grant, to write a letter to the KC Executive that the Commission is very concerned about the elimination of the key position of Farm Specialist, known as the Farmbudsman who serves as the county liaison between farmers and county government and involves the operation of Puget Sound Fresh and Farmlink programs. The letter is to be sent at the appropriate time to the County Council. Seconded by Grant. Passed unanimously.

New Business

Laurie proposed changing meeting locations for September and October. It was agreed to hold the September meeting in Carnation and have the October meeting in the Sammamish Valley with a field trip beforehand.

Meeting adjourned at 7:20pm.